



TOPIC: National Anti-Poverty Strategy 2006–2008
Submission to: Office of Social Inclusion, Department of Social and Family Affairs
Date: 19 October 2005

Background

Progressing the work of Cherish, established in 1972, **One Family** provides voice, support and action for one-parent families through membership, professional services and campaigning. Our aim is to affect positive change and achieve equality and social inclusion for all one-parent families in Ireland.

We work to achieve our aims through

Voice we are the national membership organisation of one-parent families, supporting organisations and others concerned with the issues facing one-parent families.

Support we offer a comprehensive range of professional services to one-parent families, to those experiencing a crisis pregnancy and to those working with one-parent families.

Action we campaign with and on behalf of our members to affect positive change for one-parent families.

One Family works with all types and all members of one-parent families, respecting the realities of family life in Ireland.

An integral part of our mission is to use learning gained from working with one-parent families to affect positive changes in social and family policy for one-parent families in Ireland. One Family is uniquely placed in doing so as a service provider and a voice for one-parent families for over 30 years.



One Family welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Office for Social Inclusion on the preparation of Ireland's National Anti-Poverty Strategy 2006–2008. The submission is made in the context that solo parents are increasingly disadvantaged as a group in Ireland in terms of poverty levels, social welfare dependency and access to services that help address these issues.

One Family believes that it is essential that the needs of one-parent families be clearly addressed in the new NAPS. Many solo parents have not been able to benefit from the boom created by the Celtic Tiger due to the lack of necessary supports. And many children in one-parent families are at risk of ongoing poverty and social exclusion unless strong and coordinated action is taken to address their needs.

One Family believes that policy developments in this area should take into account the following issues:

- The needs of children must be at the centre of all relevant policy developments.
- The need to ensure real choice for solo parents in terms of participation in the paid labour market and in terms of childcare arrangements.
- Many solo parents are involved in a range of caring roles, including childcare, eldercare and care of family members with disabilities.
- Solo parents have different needs and requirements at different stages of their children's lives with many requiring support to manage transitions in and out of the labour market, as well as access to wide ranging options to pursue viable part-time work.



- The importance of focusing planned policy changes and related funding on low income and other disadvantaged groups, including families and children living in poverty.
- The importance of ensuring that developments in childcare and in early childhood education and development take into account the particular needs and position of one-parent families, and actively support access by one-parent families and other low-income families to such services.
- The challenge of exploring ways of separating supports directly aimed at reducing child poverty from means tested social welfare payments for low-income families.
- The importance of developing policy in a way that respects family diversity and represents a positive approach to addressing issues of exclusion, isolation and stigma experienced by many one-parent families.

Overall, One Family believes that there is an urgent need to develop and implement a coherent policy framework for one-parent families that reflects the realities of their lives and those of their children.

The key elements of this framework are as follows:

- Reductions in child and family poverty.
- Reduced dependence on social welfare through increasing opportunities to participate in the labour market.
- Child development and education.
- Access to services: education and training, childcare, health and accommodation.
- The coordination of services and supports, including information.



This requires the coordination of policy development across Departments as well as cooperation on implementation across Departments and agencies.

Outline of submission

We begin by summarising progress, or lack of progress, in achieving the current NAPS targets, focusing on targets that are most relevant to one-parent families. We then look in more detail at the objectives and related indicators and actions we wish to see included in the new NAPS to more directly reflect the needs of one-parent families.

We believe that the next steps in the process should involve prioritising these objectives and related indicators/actions and agreeing hard targets for them, in consultation with the sector. We would, of course, be happy to participate in such discussions and also to provide any further background information. In some areas we have been unable to develop indicators due to time pressures, but we would welcome the opportunity to cooperate with the Office of Social Inclusion in the development of indicators and related targets in these areas.

Progress to date

Current NAPS Targets and progress

Current NAPS Target	Comment
To reduce the numbers of those who are consistently poor to below 2%, and if possible, eliminate consistent poverty.	Consistent poverty levels for one-parent households currently stand at 33%.
To achieve a rate of €150 per week, in 2002 terms, by 2007.	To achieve this target requires further increases in Budget 2006 and 2007, starting with an increase of €18.50 in Budget 2006.

<p>To halve the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties by 2006.</p>	<p>Support to address literacy issues among children living in poverty and in disadvantaged communities is required.</p>
<p>To reduce the proportion of the population 16–64 with restricted literacy to below 10%–20% by 2007.</p>	<p>Almost half of solo parents have only primary school level education. Literacy issues are highly related to such early school leaving.</p>
<p>To reduce the number of young people who leave the school system early, so that the percentage of those who complete upper second level or equivalent will reach 85% by 2003 and 90% by 2006.</p>	<p>Approximately 1,500 babies were born to young women aged 17 or under in 2004. A particular issue for such young mothers is leaving school early and without qualifications and the fact that there are no mechanisms in place to hold them in school nor are suitable measures in place to encourage them to return to school as soon as is practicable. UNICEF states that giving birth while still a teenager is strongly associated with disadvantage in later life. On average, across the EU, women who give birth as teenagers are twice as likely to live in poverty (Innocenti report, 2001).</p>
<p>The Strategy will aim to reduce the gap in low birth weight rates between children from the lowest socio-economic group by 10% from the current level, by 2007.</p>	<p>Access to suitable pregnancy and related services for specific groups of women, particularly asylum seekers and those at risk of homelessness, is still poor. There is also a lack of accessible information.</p>

<p>To deliver 41,500 local authority housing unit starts (including acquisitions) between 2000 and 2006.</p>	<p>75% of those on local authority housing lists are one-parent families. Future housing plans must overtly address the housing needs of this group which accounts for an increasing proportion of households.</p>
<p>Over the period to 2007 (from 2001), the strategy will aim to reduce the number of children who are consistently poor to below 2%, and if possible, eliminate consistent poverty.</p>	<p>Consistent poverty rates are 14% for children.</p>
<p>Over the period to 2007, the Strategy will aim to reduce the numbers of women who are consistently poor to below 2%, and if possible, to eliminate consistent poverty.</p>	<p>Consistent poverty levels for solo-parent headed households currently stand at 33%, 85% of whom are headed by a woman.</p>
<p>The strategy will aim at increasing the employment participation rate of women to an average of more than 60% in 2010.</p>	<p>45 per cent of solo parents are in the labour force, 43 per cent for women and 57 per cent for men. This reflects the particular difficulties faced by solo parents in accessing the labour market.</p>
<p>Over the period to 2007, the strategy will aim to reduce the numbers of older people who are consistently poor to below 2%, and if possible, eliminate consistent poverty.</p>	<p>A significant number of those in receipt of the one-parent family payment are in the middle and older age groups – 9,000 are 45 or over. This group face a high likelihood of remaining in poverty and long-term social welfare dependency unless action is taken to address their specific needs.</p>
<p>Child Benefit (CB) and Child Dependent Allowances (CDA) to be set at 33%–35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate by 2007. The final phase of the planned multi-annual increases in CB rates to be completed in 2004 and 2005.</p>	<p>CDAs have not been increased in over ten years. While existing commitments to CB may be achieved there has been no targeted action to raise children out of poverty. The real value of the CDA has fallen by a third since 1994. CB is no longer universal as children whose parents do not meet the Habitual Residency requirements are no longer eligible. Some non-Irish children are not eligible for CB.</p>
<p>The Department of Social and Family Affairs is to review the contribution being made by the Department's income support system to people reconciling work and family life, the review to be completed not later than 2005.</p>	<p>One Family welcomes this review and looks forward to considering its results and its subsequent recommendations. One-parent families face particular difficulties in</p>

	<p>combining their caring responsibilities with participation in education, training and employment. We therefore especially welcome the introduction of further actions aimed at encouraging better work-life balance.</p>
<p>To deliver an appropriate mix of social and affordable housing measures which meets the needs of different types of households.</p>	<p>One-parent families currently make up 75% of those on local authority housing lists. One-parent households face particular difficulties in accessing local authority housing due to the way in which points are allocated and houses are currently designed. One Family hopes that the new Rental Accommodation Scheme being rolled out by the local authorities will address much more effectively the needs of one-parent families.</p>
<p>Ensure that the basic needs of all families, especially young parents, solo parents, older people and ethnic minorities are met through enhanced and better coordinated State support services.</p>	<p>As referred to above, an enhanced and coordinated range of services are required to effectively address the issues faced by one-parent families in accessing state services.</p>
<p>To increase job progression rates among women and marginalised and excluded groups.</p>	<p>Effective progression routes for solo parents into skills-based training and onto higher and better paid employment are essential to move one-parent families out of poverty. One Family would like to see more concerted action in this area that recognises the multiplicity of roles played by solo parents.</p>
<p>To combat domestic violence through awareness raising and other prevention measures, and to promote coordination between the various statutory and other agencies involved in this field.</p>	<p>Domestic violence can be a feature of marriage and relationship breakdown, One Family would like to see more research in this area and follow-on action to ensure comprehensive access to family mediation services and to free legal aid.</p>
<p>The development of more formal expressions of entitlement across the range of public services and the setting of standards and guidelines regarding the standard of service delivery that can be expected by the customer, taking into account the council of</p>	<p>Lack of information on the complexity of entitlements is hindering one-parent families in accessing the income supports and services that are available to them. Action is needed in this area to better</p>

Europe recommendations on access to social rights.	coordinate policy and provision, to simplify the social welfare system and to ensure that one-parent families and other low-income families are aware of their entitlements (for example, FIS).
Each third level institution will double the participation by mature, disadvantaged students, including Travellers and refugees by 2006.	One-parent families are often only able to access third level education on a part-time basis. Action is needed to ensure that supports to encourage participation of disadvantaged groups are available for such students. In particular, children of asylum seekers face particular difficulties accessing education in Ireland once they reach the age of 18.
A five-year national women's strategy to be developed.	One Family looks forward to the publication and implementation of this strategy.

NAPS 2006–2008

One Family calls for the adoption of the following objectives and indicators aimed at better meeting the needs of one-parent families:

Objective 1 Facilitating participation in employment

One Family endorses the objectives in relation to employment policy, strategies and related actions in place in the current NAPS. However, we would call for the revised NAPS to clearly address the specific difficulties faced by solo parents in accessing education, training and employment, due to a combination of poverty traps, lack of educational qualifications and lack of childcare. We would, in particular, like to see the new NAPS committing the Government to support solo parents to access skills-based training and recognised educational qualifications on a part-time basis, and to help solo parents move into full-time employment. This requires a commitment to support the childcare costs of solo parents moving on to education, training and employment, as well as support for the wider availability of flexible work options. Such measures should also provide more suitable mechanisms for solo parents to access back-to-education and enterprise supports.

Proposed objectives

To reduce the percentage of the working-age population in workless households.



To provide flexible and positive support for solo parents wishing to return to education, training and employment, including career advice and mentoring, skill sampling, pre training and bridging programmes

To ensure that solo parents wishing to increase their participation in the labour market are supported and rewarded to do so.

To provide supports for solo parent and others in low-paid employment with low levels of qualifications to increase their skills and qualifications.

To develop and pilot suitable supports for solo parents wishing to progress from Community Employment (CE).

To develop effective mechanisms to enable CE jobs serving ongoing community needs to become long-term sustainable.

To restructure the Back-to-Work Education Allowance in order to make self-employment a realistic option for solo parents, particularly in relation to its interaction with other benefits.

To provide training, retraining and education incentives to solo parents wishing to start their own business.

To review secondary benefits aimed at supporting more smooth transitions into and out of the labour market.

To provide support for childcare costs or childcare places for those on education and training programmes and those in low-paid employment.

Proposed indicators

Reduced percentage of working-age population in workless households.

Increased percentage of solo parents moving on to higher paid jobs and real career opportunities.

Increased percentage of solo parents progressing from CE to skills based training and education.

Increased provision of part-time education and training places leading to recognised skills and qualifications.

Increased percentage of solo parents on BTWEA.

Increased percentage of solo parents becoming mature students.



Objective 2 Facilitating access to services

Provision of better information

Much more information is required on one-parent families and on the barriers that they face in participating in employment and in accessing services.

Proposed objective

To carry our research on one-parent families and to develop a coordinated strategy to address their needs and to encourage their greater participation in employment

Income adequacy and security

Many solo parents have a variety of caring arrangements which mean that they can not avail of paid employment or must remain, in part, dependent on social welfare.

Proposed objectives

To increase the One Parent Family Payment to reflect rising wage costs and inflation.

To increase the earning disregard in relation to the One Parent Family Payment to a level equivalent to 80 per cent of gross average industrial earnings, which was the level it was at when introduced in 1997.

To reduce child poverty among those dependent on social welfare or in low-paid employment in a way that is employment neutral.

To simplify the operation of the social welfare system and to improve linkages between this system and the tax system.

Proposed indicators

Reduced consistent poverty levels in one-parent family households.

Reduced consistent poverty levels among children.

Income support in employment

Proposed objectives

To increase the national minimum wage to reflect cost-of-living increases.



To reduce hours worked to qualify for Family Income supplement (FIS).

To ensure widespread promotion of FIS.

To review the way FIS operates to ensure that its uptake is maximised.

Proposed indicators

Increased national minimum wage.

Reduce hours for eligibility to FIS to 17.5 per week or 35 per 2 weeks.

Housing and accommodation

Proposed objectives

To reduce the proportion of one-parent families on local authority housing lists.

To revise ways of supporting the housing costs of low-income families in order to reduce the extent to which such supports act as poverty traps.

To plan, design and build more houses that are suitable for one-parent families.

To eliminate fuel poverty.

Proposed indicators

Reduced numbers of one-parent families on the housing list.

Increased number of houses built that are suitable for one-parent families, including a recognition that many children live in two one-parent families in shared-parenting situations. Suitable housing for both parents in such situations should be provided by local authorities.

Increased fuel allowance rates and increased income levels for eligibility to such allowances, to reflect current costs and to ensure consistency with income limits applied to other social welfare supports.



Health

Proposed objectives

To provide information and supports to specific groups in accessing suitable pregnancy and maternity services.

To provide medical cards to all children.

To ensure that access to the medical card does not act as a disincentive to becoming independent of social welfare.

Proposed indicators

Increased income thresholds for eligibility for the full medical card.

Within the overall objective of all children having a full medical card, all children covered by proposed anti-child poverty targeted supports, under Child Benefit, CDAs or FIS, to have a medical card by 2008.

Education

Proposed objectives

To provide supports for young mothers to remain and return to school.

To provide more early childhood development and education in disadvantaged areas.

To provide more accessible, second-chance education to solo parents who left school with low or no qualifications, including comprehensive part-time provision.

To provide targeted support for life-long learning for low earners and those dependent on social welfare, including solo parents.

To provide back-to-school allowances at a level that reflects the real costs of maintaining children in education and to increase the income limit for access to such allowances.

Proposed indicators

Provision of a stay-in-school payment for young mothers.



Provision of a greater number of early childhood development and education places in disadvantaged areas.

Elimination of waiting lists for access to publicly provided specialist education services.

Establishment of a fund for those dependent on social welfare to access a wide variety of education and skills-development options.

Increases in back-to-school allowances to €150 for primary school and €230 for secondary school students.

Introduction of a one-off grant for low-income families with children transferring from primary to secondary school, at €400 per child.

Assessment of solo parents in their own right for eligibility to education grants.

Reduction in levels of illiteracy among school children.

Reduction in numbers not transferring to secondary school.

Access to information and supports for young people in school and in the community on relationships, sexuality and parenting.

Objective 3 Preventing the risk of exclusion

The knowledge society

Proposed objectives

To ensure comprehensive access to IT training for solo parents.

To support internet access for vulnerable groups of children and adults.

Homelessness

Proposed objectives

To ensure the provision of specialist accommodation for those at risk of homelessness when accessing pregnancy and maternity services.



Domestic violence

Proposed objective

To carry out research on the relationship between family break up and domestic violence.

Indebtedness

Proposed objective

To reduce the level of indebtedness currently experienced by one-parent families (recent research indicates that nearly a third of the clients of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MAPS) are in receipt of the One Parent Family Payment (OPEN, 2005).

Preserving family solidarity

Proposed objectives

To support initiatives aimed at developing a greater understanding of and respect for family diversity.

To provide ongoing support for family resource centres.

To ensure that government policies do not work against family formation.

Objective 4 To help the most vulnerable

One-parent families

Proposed objectives

One Family calls for the promotion of family diversity and for the development of a long-term vision within Irish policy aimed at the elimination of poverty and social exclusion experienced by one-parent families.

A key step towards achieving this vision is the inclusion of one-parent families as a specified vulnerable group within NAPS, given the high levels of poverty and social exclusion which such families face and the particular needs that they have.



Proposed indicators

One Family calls for the following overarching indicators:

- A reduction in consistent poverty rates among one-parent families to 2%.
- A reduction in consistent poverty level for children to 2%.

The sections above have highlighted the key objectives and related indicators in relation to one-parent families that we believe should be included under NAPS to begin to achieve this vision. We have not repeated them here.

Older people

Proposed objective

Solo parents who have been outside the labour force for many years and who are no longer eligible for the One Parent Family Payment due to the age of their children are in need of support to reduce their risk of living in poverty.

People with disabilities

Proposed objective

Solo parents are involved in a range of caring roles. The particular needs of solo parents with disabilities or caring for others with disabilities must be taken into account when developing policies for this group.

Urban poverty and rural disadvantage

Proposed objective

There is a need to ensure that services are developed and provided in a way that specifically takes into account the particular barriers faced by one-parent families in accessing services in both urban and rural areas.

Gender perspective

Proposed objective

One-parent families, mainly headed by women (85 per cent), are at high risk of poverty. Such families have particular needs in relation to: caring, access to work, access to health services and childcare. This particular situation provides an overall context within which policies must be developed.



NAPS should be solo-parent proofed to ensure that policies and related actions are focused on reducing poverty levels and increasing participation rates among this group.

Migrants

Proposed objectives

Ensure the provision of accessible pregnancy and maternity support services for migrant women.

Ensure the provision of culturally appropriate information.

Objective 5 Mobilising all relevant bodies

Good practice

Proposed objectives

Many examples of good practice in service delivery for one-parent families have now been developed and tested. Such good practice should be mainstreamed, for example, the Teen Parents Support Programme.

A responsible person should be designated in each government department to ensure that mainstreaming happens where relevant.

The 'good practice' learnt from the Equality for Women project currently being run by One Family with the cooperation of the LESs on supporting solo parents access relevant services, should be mainstreamed.

Quality services

Proposed objectives

There is a need to ensure quality service provision and good access to information for vulnerable groups such as one-parent families.

Training should be provided for service providers on the issues relating to parenting alone.



Local government anti-poverty network

Proposed objectives

There is a need to ensure coordinated and high-quality service provision for one-parent families at regional, county and local level. This includes actions to raise awareness among local authorities, County Development Boards of one-parent family issues and how to address them.

This should include consultation with solo-parent support groups in the development of policy and related actions, especially in targeted areas under RAPID, Clar etc.

More supports are also required for organisations working with one-parent families.

Data

Proposed objective

There is a need to develop and implement data strategies that provide accurate, high-quality, relevant data on one-parent families in Ireland today, and on likely future trends to inform policy developments in this area.

Monitoring

Proposed objective

Effective consultation should also include feedback on the monitoring and implementation of new policies and related actions with groups representative of one-parent families.

The impact of NAPS policies and related actions should be monitored and evaluated in a way that allows their impact on one-parent families to be clearly assessed.

Proofing

Proposed objective

The Budget, NAPS and other key policy documents should be one-parent family proofed and their impact on vulnerable groups including one-parent families fully assessed.

**This submission is made on behalf of One Family – voice, support and action for one-parent families. Queries should be directed to Candy Murphy, Policy & Campaigns Manger, One Family
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